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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 005190

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/07/2025

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: RULING AKP'S GRASSROOTS DIFFICULTIES IN ANKARA'S URBAN SPRAWL

REF: A. ANKARA 4914

[1](#)B. ANKARA 4042

[1](#)C. ANKARA 4497

[1](#)D. ANKARA 4857

Classified By: POLCOUNS Janice G. Weiner; E.O. 12958, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) faces challenges in trying to maintain momentum in meeting its extremely ambitious goals for grassroots party building. AKP is running into difficulty filling party slots with clean, competent people; corrupt politicians, businessmen, and even gangsters try to join the party. Local party leaders must also balance the sharply differing ideological and territorial factions within the party. While AKP's grassroots organization gives it a huge advantage over Turkey's other parties, in the long run, corruption and AKP's lack of internal democracy threaten to erode its strength. End Summary.

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TOP-DOWN PARTYBUILDING: FINDING THE "RIGHT" INDIVIDUALS  
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[1](#)2. (C) AKP Altindag sub-provincial chairman Orhan Kaya, a longstanding Embassy contact, tells us that AKP has set ambitious goals for grassroots party building in Ankara and other provinces. AKP seeks to have 25 percent of the adult population enrolled as members of the party. In addition to the provincial, sub-provincial, and local party officials, AKP wants to duplicate in Ankara and elsewhere its Istanbul approach of having an AKP representative on every street and in every apartment building. They also want to assign nine individuals to party-building tasks for every ballot box in Turkey -- three seasoned male party members, three women's auxiliary members, and three youth auxiliary members.

[1](#)3. (C) Altindag is a poor section of Ankara with about 400,000 residents, including 230,000 residents of voting age. AKP, according to Kaya, has 30,000 members in Altindag, including 10,000 who hold official positions within the party. He acknowledges that the party is now having difficulty attracting qualified people. AKP wants "moderate, socially conservative, well-educated, and well-meaning" individuals to take leadership positions within the party. However, Kaya acknowledged most individuals who fit this bill simply want to vote and do not want to play an active role in politics. The individuals who want to be active in politics tend to be more radical or extreme in their views. They also tend to be less well-educated. The second problem is that corrupt individuals -- including leaders of criminal gangs and corrupt businessmen -- are trying to join the party in Altindag. This problem has infected other Turkish parties in the past; according to Kaya, AKP's leadership is trying to keep the party clean.

[1](#)4. (C) Criminal gangs, for example, control street vendors and car parking rings (extorting money to "protect" parked cars). A gang "protects" a certain turf, but requires those it "protects" to make financial contributions to the gang. These payments are then used by the gang to bribe local police and governmental officials -- and buy influence with political parties. Kaya claimed that he was approached by a former mayor of Altindag from the now-closed (Islamist-oriented) Fazilet party with a plan for funding the party with contributions from gang-controlled street vendors.

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FACTIONALISM WITHIN AKP  
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[1](#)5. (C) In Kaya's view, AKP is dominated at the national level by people from the Milli Gorus (National View) line, the outwardly-hard-line Islamist political and social movement of Necmettin Erbakan, who was in various coalition governments in the 1970's and was Prime Minister from 1996-97. (Comment: Milli Gorus has a certain presence in the AKP parliamentary group and appears to control a majority of AKP's provincial level organizations. There are other groups in AKP as well -- including followers of Islamist thinker Fethullah Gulen, members of the Suleymanci and other Naksibendi-derivative brotherhoods, former right-of-center DYPers, former

center-right ANAPers, leftists, and social democrats -- but none is dominant, according to a broad range of Embassy contacts within AKP. End Comment.)

16. (C) According to Kaya, the Milli Gorus group in AKP is divided into two main factions: the Iskender Pasa lodge and the Selametciler. The Iskender Pasa lodge is associated with Erdogan and the three ministers closest to him: Finance Minister Unakitan, Energy Minister Guler, and Transport Minister Yildirim. The Selametciler are close to former PM Erbakan and try to pack local party organizations with their supporters. Kaya added that the AKP party administration in Ankara is not controlled by the Selametciler and the current leader -- a Suleymanci -- tries to balance the various factions within the party.

17. (C) Another major source of factionalism within the Ankara AKP is localism, Kaya noted. There are a number of factions based upon where one was born or where one's family came from. These factions include longtime Ankara residents, eastern Anatolians (principally from Erzurum), those with Black Sea roots, and Kurds. The Black Sea faction is weak in Ankara, but strong in AKP's Istanbul provincial organization and in the Cabinet. Erdogan's roots are in the Black Sea province of Rize. In Ankara, the people from various towns in eastern Anatolia have banded together to form one super-faction.

18. (C) There is also what Kaya described as a small opposition movement within AKP. The opposition has no leadership and no organizing political principle. It is simply made up of individuals who were not selected to run for office in the March 2004 local elections and those individuals who were overlooked for leadership roles in the party at the provincial, sub-provincial, or local levels. They are trying to organize but in Kaya's assessment they are unlikely to present a significant challenge to the current party leadership.

19. (C) Comment. The organization, size, strength, and commitment of AKP's grassroots give it a huge structural advantage vis-a-vis its competitors (ref A), who generally do not even try to build grassroots support. Although AKP claims to be an internally democratic party, the senior leadership still runs the party in the traditional authoritarian manner and the party has repeatedly changed its bylaws to strengthen the control of the senior leadership. Despite numerous instances of AKP corruption, most Turks still believe AKP is not as corrupt as previous governing parties. AKP remains the electoral juggernaut of Turkish politics and the other opposition parties are largely ineffective (refs B, C, and D), but if AKP fails to remedy its lack of internal democracy and corruption, its grassroots strength will deteriorate. End Comment.

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